DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 074 011 SO 005 738

AUTHOR	Dupuis, Mary M., Ed.; Mitzel, Harold E., Ed.
TITLE	Sociology and the Study of Education. Report of a Planning Conference for the NIE Planning Unit.
INSTITUTION	National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C. Planning Unit.
REPORT NO	R-C106
BUREAU NO	BR-1-7059
PUB DATE	30 Jul 71
GRANT	OEG-0-71-3636(515)
NOTE	7p.; Report of a Planning Conference for the NIE Planning Unit (Washington, D.C., July 30-31, 1971)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	Conference Reports; Educational Economics; *Educational Equality; *Educational Improvement; Educational Philosophy; Educational Planning; Educational Problems; *Educational Quality; Educational Research; Educational Resources; *Educational Sociology; Foundations of Education; Intellectual Disciplines; Social Sciences; *Sociology
IDENTIFIERS	*National Institute of Education

ABSTRACT

Among the explorations undertaken in the course of establishing the National Institute of Education (NIE) by the NIE Planning Unit was a set of eleven conferences of experts on educational problems, methods, and content. Three of these conferences focused on the contributions that anthropology, psychology, and sociology might make to the fulfillment of NIE goals. This report covers the conference of seven sociologists in mid-1971. Attention focused on the possible conflicts among the three basic goals posited for NIE--between equality, on the one hand, and quality and resource effectiveness, on the other. Quality and resource effectiveness require different kinds of education to meet the different needs and talents of individuals; but such differences cannot exist without accompanying connotations of higher and lower, good and bad, prestige and stigma. Populist sentiment, in the name of equality, seems to call for leveling all education up, or down, to a common, undifferentiated, system. The group felt that sociologists could be helpful in finding goals and strategies for achieving appropriate diversity while minimizing problems of status and stigma. Other problems addressed included questions about what makes an educational institution resilient, the relationships between size and other characteristics of educational institutions, and the characteristics of our educational system that make teachers feel weak and ineffective. Related documents are ED 047 167, SO 005 739, and SO 005 740. (IM)

FILMED FROM BEST AVAILABLE COPY

ED 074011

Report No. C106

SOCIOLOGY AND THE STUDY OF EDUCATION

Report of a Planning Conference
for the NIE Planning Unit

July 30-31, 1971

Washington, D. C.

SP005 738

Orville G. Brim, Jr., Russell Sage Foundation
Burton R. Clark (Chairman), Yale University
Bruce K. Eckland, University of North Carolina
Dan C. Lortie, University of Chicago
James P. Pitts, University of California, Los Angeles
David Riesman, Harvard University
Martin Trow, University of California, Berkeley

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
Planning Unit

This series is prepared under Project No. 1-7059, Grant No. OEG-0-71-3636(515), for the U.S. Office of Education's National Institute of Education Planning Unit, Dr. Harry Silberman, Director.

Edited by Mary M. Dupuis, Ph.D.; Harold E. Mitzel, Ph.D., Project Director, College of Education, The Pennsylvania State University.

This Planning document was submitted to the NIE Planning Unit. Views or conclusions contained in this study should not be interpreted as representing the official policy of the NIE Planning Unit, Office of Education, United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

SOCIOLOGY AND THE STUDY OF EDUCATION

In the bright sun of its best days, the sociological imagination reflects the light and shadow of man's relation to man. Sociology assumes man in the group, organization, and society, given purpose as well as restrained by his social bonds. It treats man as a creature of idea, norm, and belief, set free as well as compelled by symbols shared by many minds. The analyses of sociology naturally include man guided by rational pattern and possessed by logical thought; but the sociological quest particularly quickens at the edge of rationality, where group tie and compulsion, tradition and sentiment, enter heavily in social exchange. An imaginative sociology earns its way in sensitivity to man's full repertoire of interaction and response.

In our effort here to help inform the agenda of a productive National Institute of Education, several other features of modern sociology come to mind. One is wide empirical range and concern with complexity. Much of the best sociology is presently catholic in taking into account a variety of factors. It is willing to deal with the connected effects of historical, social, and psychological forces. In attempting to see various aspects of reality in their joint interaction, sociological analysis thereby sometimes achieves a useful approximation of the way the world works. Other disciplines have other research strategies at the center of their efforts; e.g., that of attempting to isolate the effects of specific variables that are seen as appropriate to the concerns of the field. Parts of sociology work in this fashion. But the inclusive strategy, committed to the interacting complexity of the empirical world, seems clearly a useful one in a major national effort to develop research that leads to practical development.

This catholic empirical coverage also entails a growing willingness to move across ordinary disciplinary boundaries. There is a sense of the simultaneous relevance of historical, social structural, normative, and psychological forces in, for example, the massive problems discussed below of educational inequality, teacher discontent, and institutional competence. We believe that an increasing number of men in other fields are similarly oriented, especially as they confront the awesome problems of education. A willingness to range across disciplinary lines is a characteristic of useful social science for a National Institute of Education.

Lastly, modern sociology assumed some years ago the posture of searching for the unintended and unanticipated consequences of purposive social action, a matter of the greatest importance for the role of social science in public policy. This posture presses the researcher to estimate consequences in numerous directions, for various persons and groups, practices and values, in the process of proceeding from research to the making of proposals for policy and reform. The tunnel vision necessary in the dark hours of examining a three-variable relationship becomes a blindness in moving from research to development. Again, our concern here is surely shared with some colleagues in other disciplines. A social science appropriate for a national R&D institute should be sensitive to the range of issues and factors that are most important for various public policies.

The characteristics of sociology that we are emphasizing are highly relevant to the study of the institutional web constituting "Education." The educational domain is rooted in history and entangled in the current structure of community and society; yet it must face and predict the future that the young will have as their own. The enterprise is possessed by values that conflict, norms that contradict, and commitments that divide, as well as common understandings that unite and acts of cooperation that bring mutual advantage. Education is notably a center of sentiment, since it taps deep emotions in parents, offers "intangible" psychological and social rewards to those who work its halls, plays on nostalgia in the hearts of citizen and lawmaker, and bears heavily on each of us in turn in the sensitive years of developing personal identity and social belief. We should have expected what we fast have been learning: that this burdened social institution is opaque to the quick glance and resistant to the rational plan. The effort to grasp and solve the evolving problems of modern education clearly needs the sensitivities of many approaches. It will require openness and flexibility as well as the sustained application of the best of traditional method. It will need the patience, caring, and determination that we find in the best practitioners of the arts of teaching and administration. The characteristics of sociology discussed here are ones that we believe can help.

To convey more specifically our perspectives, our judgments as to what is important, and our awareness of inevitable dilemmas among competing good things, we wish here to highlight six major aspects of the situation in modern education that appear eminently important. We believe each topic bears on the three problem areas of inequality, quality, and resource effectiveness. Each warrants a major research effort in its own right or in some combination of foci within the larger areas.

EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY AND SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

The Definition of Inequality. When examining either the causes or consequences of educational inequalities, disadvantages or the like, we need to distinguish between inequalities in opportunities and inequalities in rewards. The first form deals with how different available educational places or openings are allocated to individuals, essentially whether they are achieved on personal merit or ascribed on the basis of some group or cultural characteristic. Here one is concerned that there not be discrimination by race, class, religion, or sex in the offering of available opportunities to the young, that schools and colleges, whatever their differences, fairly select, sort, and certify. The second form, inequalities in the reward structure, refers to quantitative and qualitative differences in the kinds of education students receive and in the institutions that serve them. Here one is concerned with how the educational system is stratified (e.g., the prestige system of colleges) and how educational resources are used (e.g., the proportion of people who will receive a college education). In any given age group, everyone obviously does not receive the same amount or quality of education.

Simply estimating the magnitude of educational inequality becomes confusing when these two forms are not made distinct. Root causes and social consequences are even more muddled. Equality of educational opportunity may be increasing in a given period, but may not be perceived if observers are taking note largely of the retention of status differentials within the system. Such elementary disentanglement of various meanings of "inequality" is essential, especially in light of the fundamental contest between "populist" and "elite" definitions of education (discussed below) that lies deep in American culture.

The Family and Equal Opportunity. The small "nuclear family" as we know it today is only one of numerous ways of rearing children which have been adopted by human societies at different times and in different places. The modern American family, of course, competes with a variety of socializing agents in influencing the growing child. Among these agents is the school. Some schools clearly "develop the child" and transmit the core values of the larger society from one generation to the next with little direct interference from the family, e.g., the private boarding school. But as various studies have pointed out, across the population, academic achievement is apparently far more dependent upon family background than upon whatever influences most schools exert. The advantages or disadvantages that parents confer upon their children are increasingly viewed as the prime factor inihbiting equality of educational opportunity. This view directs attention to the structure and milieu of the family. It leads toward suggested solutions that involve alternative structures for supporting the young and intervention, direct or indirect, between the child and his parents.

Wise men who care about their society should be concerned about this, since basic values are in conflict and the dilemmas are enormous. The principle of equality encourages measures that would severly limit the transference of social status from parent to child, thereby allowing each child to compete fairly and succeed on the basis of his own merits. Yet it is almost impossible to overestimate the extraordinary lengths that many advantaged parents will go to in order to protect their children's advantages. And we immediately face questions: If equality of educational opportunity indeed cannot be achieved except at the expense of the family, then should there by efforts to diminish the family? Is the price too high to pay? As we pursue a course toward equality of opportunity, are we prepared to help cause a major redefinition of parent-child relationships and the functions of the nuclear family? If so, are we prepared to provide for rearing children by other means? Will the task be left to the schools, to which it already appears to be gradually falling? Do we tip the balance in favor of social disintegration when we help erode the institution most fundamental to the social orders of the past? We tinker not at the margins here but rather at one of the vital centers of the social structure. We can hardly do too much research on the family-schooling relationship, since we shall need great sophistication in diagnosis and great skill in developing new patterns and strengthening some of the old.

The Assumption of Failure of Educational Achievement. The current view that black and brown students fail to achieve at desirable levels in educational institutions because of family, cultural, and personality deficiencies seems often to contain the assumption that previous lower-class strata made more effective use of education. But if features of the labor market were more important than academic training for previous lower stratum mobility, then a more modest definition of education's possible contribution would be appropriate or more demonstration would be needed that academic training is definitely becoming more crucial. More light on the impact of the labor market in the mobility of entire lower social strata might not only shift the emphasis to political economy, but also help set the stage for realistic expectations of what a national effort in educational research and development might do in increasing social equality.

The Vices and Virtues of Educational Selection. The educational system stops or deflects some students while encouraging others to go on to higher levels and obtain the more advanced certificates and degrees. Some observers feel that the system is too decisive at various levels in discriminating between those who are educationally successful and unsuccessful. The selection process, moreover, is difficult to defend when its supporters cannot clearly demonstrate that the criteria used to sort and select have direct relevance to later occupational success and may often mislabel young people on the probability of later educational success. The arguments against educational selection, applied increasingly to the higher levels of education, often appear compelling.

Yet we should not overlook two possibilities: that our schools and colleges generally may be more meritocratic—use more universal standards for advancement—than the world of work; and that loosening the meritocratic or allocative function of education may create more inequality of opportunity than presently exists, leaving the most important educational decisions (e.g., who goes to college and where) to fall once again upon the family, social heredity, or politics. If indeed our economic system arbitrarily discriminates against racial, sex, and other "minorities" to the extent that some observers have indicated, one could argue for more rather than less universalistic standards in educational selection and a closer rather than a looser fit between educational attainment and occupational placement. At least we should proceed cautiously in condemning our schools and colleges for setting standards which not everyone is expected to achieve. Unlike the world of work where the norms of achievement are frequently and perhaps necessarily evaded (e.g., in job rights and seniority), schools may be the more important arena for "letting the best man win."

The Stigmas of the Categorical Program. Stubborn educational problems follow from the social ranking of occupations and social groups, levels and types of schooling that prepare for variously-ranked jobs and adult locations. The problem is now an old one in vocational education at the secondary level; the British have had much experience with the lack of a "parity of esteem" for their several major forms of secondary schooling; and community colleges feel the status crunch as the "lowest" tier in higher education. The problem becomes measurably sharper when special and highly visible programs are mounted which are directed solely at the bottom stratum of society. The stigmas that soon flower become debilitating for institutions and persons alike. They are among the most basic of the "non-rational" adverse consequences of policies in social welfare and education made with other ends in view.

In our efforts to reduce inequalities in educational opportunity, serious investigation of stigma effects might well lead to a position of avoiding efforts earmarked for a social stratum and of advocating programs which would strive for a common minimal level of achievement. Allowing for individual differences, the society might attempt to insure that each individual have reading, mathematical, and learning skills which would permit him to compete for advanced education or jobs. This approach would be congenial with an emphasis in the early years of schooling on diagnosis and feedback to the student, rather than labeling and elimination. It might also be appropriate to a reform of the general educational structure in which the comprehensive public school restricts itself to certain basic skills while alternative settings for education and socialization carry out various other functions.

Social Destratification in Education. Some social critics have argued for less social differentiation in the educational reward structure, i.e., more equality in the quality of our schools and in how much schooling people receive. This could simply mean a basic education

for all, as in a "right to read" program; or it could mean common higher education for everyone; or it could mean making every institution equally distinguished or undistinguished. At least three critical issues are involved:

1. How far and at what stages in the educational process does destratification make good sense? As a general rule, status differentials in formal education increase as students progress. At what point do such differentials become self-defeating, if they do?

2. To what extent can we ignore the manpower needs of the nation? Our educational system is geared in many ways to its utilitarian value and the efficient use of human resources. Educational differentials are connected to differentials in the labor force. The connection requires closer examination.

3. Diversity and individuality are widely seen as desirable goals. May destratification end up removing the sources of variation and creating sameness, rather than simply removing the invidious comparisons that arise from individual or group differences? Thus, one of the most serious problems in providing variety in education, as well as in most human experience, is that of attempting to maintain diversity while avoiding the stigmatizing effects of status ranks. To try to do both may be our impossible dream, but at least it is a critical matter for research and policy to develop greater sensitivity on points of balance and the payoffs of various combinations of effort.

INSTITUTIONAL VARIETY AND RESILIENCE

As we turn our attention to the sources of diversity and individuality, we need to know so much about how educational institutions are formed, how they survive, and how they are recreated. We still know so little about how men and women and other resources are mobilized for new enterprises; about how purpose is made operational and a productive organizational identity achieved; about the gains and losses of the flexible posture as compared with those of the singular commitment; and, notably, about the dilemmas inherent in the organizational means of serious innovation—the charismatic beginning, the ideological fervor, the fear of routinization.

The extent of individual choice and the level of voluntariness among students, teachers and administrators at all levels of education depends on the extent of institutional differentiation and uniqueness. For real choice there must be real alternatives, and we are struck with the contrast between the amount of choice available in American higher education, based on its marked internal differentiation, and the little choice available in primary and secondary education because of a lack of differentiation. There is much concern nationally for a higher measure of voluntariness at all levels and much research and experimentation are needed on how to achieve and maintain a desired range of variation within and between individual schools and sets of schools.

Yet the dilemmas here are imposing and the problems immense. Varied schools raise the spectre of differential treatment and increased inequality. To be organizationally flexible and responsive to consumer choice brings the possibility that while some schools may become seriously better, some others will go from bad to worse. Clearly, choice ought not to be nearly infinite, and in fact will not be because of the constraints of organizational, economic, and political realities. In a society with strong impulses toward bureaucratic order and much influenced by traditions of equal treatment, we apparently do not stand in danger of becoming unhinged by too much variety. Rather, the leverage of experimentation and reform will probably need to be in the direction of increased variety, even in higher education.

There will also be great advantage in studying the resilience of schools and colleges. Educational institutions often seem to have an uncommon capacity to get the work done somehow and stagger on to another year. They have people who work desperately hard, the "Thank-God-for-Joe" people: teachers whose hours never end, custodians who get the place cleaned up, registrars who see that the grades get in and the seniors graduated in spite of anarchic faculty. Such schools have reserves in the form not only of underutilized resources but also of devoted people whose time and energy can be stretched to meet sudden overloads on the system, as when bed and board as well as classrooms must be found for another one hundred unanticipated freshmen. In this regard, we can ask: why haven't our inner city schools broken down even more than is already the case? They remain stitched together in part by bureaucracy and the paycheck, but so much seems not accounted for by formal structure and rational calculation. Clearly, distinguished schools and colleges are frequently loaded with mystique. But even the places that operate at the bottom of the barrel, often

defined as grubby and mean-spirited, seem to possess cadres of devoted workers. Deep belief in "education" or in the immorality of failing the young is probably a prime resource of these institutions. Yet, as belief is chipped away, hedonism spreads, and despair deepens, there are limits to the resilience of the devoted.

Such matters warrant high priority in research sensitive probing of the depths of institutional reserve and the ways of building resiliency. We can define a central task of institutional leadership as that of enhancing resilience. We can encourage an R&D effort that will help administrators at local, state and national levels to better comprehend and fulfill this task.

GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURE AND THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

There is so much that depends on who has the power! And whoever has it, there are various pressures and limits on that power. We have spoken of voluntariness as linked to the differentiation of schools and the encouragement of organizational uniqueness. Immediately, we encounter the organizational-political question of what range of variation is possible within and between schools, under different forms of organization and coordination, at different stages of historical development, under different degrees of legitimacy, and in different value climates. How much variation can a single board of education allow among the schools under its jurisdiction? Parents and others in the community tend to define differences invidiously and to demand that all schools be leveled up or down, on the ground that we cannot allow a wide variation, some parts of which are going to have "bad" consequences for students. Questions of institutional differentiation thus become questions of the governing structure. Much variation probably means many governing boards. In any event, the nature and quality of the educational processes in the schools are directly linked to alternatives in governmental structure.

At the same time, we need to look into the possible long-range, unanticipated and unintended consequences of such major changes in governmental structure as are now being advocated in the use of a voucher system together with a more viable private sector and a more decentralized public sector. What if the long-range effect is to deepen and institutionalize even more the existing cultural and social differences within society? The matter needs the most searching kinds of analysis.

SCALE AND ITS EFFECTS

The scale of educational organization works its effects in a great variety of ways. Small scale tends to require a greater mixing of students of different characteristics, even ages, in the same classrooms, where large scale allows more specialization in teaching and more differentiation by student characteristics. The problems of communication and coordination change markedly and there is considerable difference in the closeness and stability of relationships. Large scale seems to promote standardization around massive specialized operations and finally a routinization of paths and careers that reduces individuality and local variety. The many effects seem to add up to fundamentally different qualities in the educational experience and in the occupational life of teachers and administrators. Scale seems even to alter basic sentiments, as when teachers, students, parents, and administrators in the very large district all come to feel powerless. We suspect that the economies of scale taper off much later on the growth curve than the social and psychological gains of increasing size. Much sensitive inquiry from a number of disciplines is needed and soon, for we shall hardly learn too much too fast on this matter, compared with the rate at which the large is replacing the small.

THE HISTORICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL BASES OF DISCONTENT

Behind much of our discussion thus far has run the theme of the tension between the broad currents of populism in American society, which are apparently growing in strength, and the traditional concerns of the training of elite groups and the conditions for elite achievement. Populism is inherently the enemy of variations, since it defines all differences as potential inequalities and all inequalities as inequities. Rooted in American history and current social thought, the tension between this view of equality and the elite views of selection and excellence may well be the central one in American society. It surely is moving to the center in educational problems: how to maintain distinctive institutions and yet have control by a populace that opposes elitism and hierarchy; how to select and reward by merit in the face of popular opposition to the differences in status and other rewards that are entailed. Major discontents directly follow: traditionalists, concerned with excellence, merit, and support of the esoteric, view with great alarm the reforms that are based on the populist thrust; reformers, fixed on the

importance of removing all inequalities, are sorely impatient with the stubborn capacity of some groups and institutions to maintain distinctions and differences.

Many of us wish to play to both sets of values and to use R&D to gain insight into alternative sets of combined effort that will realize some of one and some of the others. "Equality and achievement" may well be at the heart of the concerns of the NIE and of the relation of social science to public policy in education. Here we would like especially to encourage historical and comparative research that will help us stand for a while outside the entire value system of our own contemporary society, the better to view the main drift in current affairs as well as to learn from the wisdom of other men in other times and places.

THE VULNERABILITIES OF TEACHING

Issues of inequality, quality, and effective use of resources in education are very much bound up in the nature of the teaching role and the characteristics of teaching as an occupation. Recruitment plays an important part, as does preparatory work in teacher training. But we are most of all impressed with the vulnerabilities of the career and social position of American classroom teachers. Two aspects of their existence stand out: the teachers' lack of protection against public attack and their increasing proclivity to feel malaise and even despair.

The sources of the vulnerabilities of American teaching are rooted in the societal definition of public schooling, the structural arrangements built to provide it, the nature of teacher tasks, and the state of technical culture in the occupation. The ideology that underlies the American public school system assumes widespread and even universal educability. Many teachers internalize the expectation of universal accomplishment; when they cannot reach all the children, they feel acute discomfort. The ideology has spurred Americans on to more demanding efforts, but there are also some negative consequences for those who are being so spurred. The structures built to implement the ideal of universal schooling, in turn, are based on compulsion, to the point where the participants in teaching and studying are likely to experience their mutual relationship as coerced. Students have little choice, the teachers somewhat more but still relatively little compared with the formal rights of other professionals. In this coerced relationship, the teacher is expected to motivate and manage the students; the load of motivational difficulties falls on him.

Then, thirdly, the tasks of teachers are particularly peculiar in their intangibility. Goals are ambiguous and lacking in consensus. Teachers confront difficult questions of emphasis and action. They find it most difficult to ascertain whether they have been effective. Confronted with various indeterminacies, teachers develop strategies to reassure themselves. But their own strategies are often thin, easily pierced by the external critic who assesses them against conceptions of universal benefit. As a result, discouragement is a repetitive motif in the talk of teachers. Finally, the trade knowledge of teachers remains weak. Teaching continues as a hit-or-miss affair in which some excel and others do not. The system lacks the capacity to diffuse whatever it is that in some instances produces high effectiveness.

Clearly we need research and development based on the natural setting of teaching. Abstract formulations must give way to close analysis of the actual demands faced by the classroom teacher and to strategies which take the group nature of classrooms into account. Some recent reform efforts deal with parts of the situation; e.g., voucher plans enhance voluntarism, performance contracting narrows objectives to clearly stated cognitive goals and makes provision for their measurement. More broadly, it is time for us to think about ways in which the assumed centrality of schools in formal socialization should be altered. We need to inquire into alternative arrangements for socialization and social allocation. If we inquire seriously into what modern schools cannot achieve, we may gain a better balance in our expectations for teachers. We might even so reshape the role of teaching that it would be less conducive to a life of despair and to the various passive and active reactions to frustration that seem irrational to others.

CONCLUSION

Many other matters are of fundamental importance: the many subtleties involved in teacher-student relations in the reforming of classroom environments; the dilemmas of planning and coordination in relation to voluntary effort and local variety; the necessity of seeing personality and individual action in the context of specific social settings. In addition, we have said nothing about the importance of

basic demographic information, and of straight ethnographic reporting on what a huge aggregation of people are variously thinking and doing in schools and colleges. And then there are the open-ended topics of life-long education and alternative structures of socialization. But the six topics briefly set forth here are sufficient to suggest our perspectives and emphases and to set in themselves an imposing agenda.

As a final note, we should like to emphasize the importance of the observation of human events. Education may be heavier than air, in the view of many observers, but somewhere out in the field, men and women are making it fly. Let us go look and listen, in many places, and with great patience. As we observe the inventiveness of the creative practitioners, we can forge the concepts and assemble the descriptions that will lead others to understand and to achieve. If the National Institute of Education is to help temper the educational winds, it will need watchers out on the many terrains of reality. It is there that we will find the best and the worst, and will sense most fully how here in education, if at all possible, we may improve man's relation to man.